

Mangrove Man: Dialogics of Culture in the Sepik Estuary, by David Lipset. Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 106. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. ISBN 0-521-56434-4, cloth; ISBN 0-521-56435-2, paper; xviii + 335 pages, figures, maps, tables, photographs, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, us\$59.95; paper us\$22.95.

Approaching the sea, Papua New Guinea's famed Sepik River meanders through an estuary of steamy mangrove swamps and broad lagoons. Long characterized as the "Murik Lakes" by expatriates, this is the home of the Murik people who call themselves Bar Nor or "mangrove man." They were first described in a series of *Anthropos* articles by Father Joseph Schmidt, an Austrian, who established a Catholic mission among them in 1913 and remained there until his death thirty years later. It was Sir Michael Somare, born and raised in a Murik village and Papua New Guinea's first prime minister, who first suggested to Lipset and his fellow anthropologist and wife, Kathleen Barlow, the village where they settled. Somare also wrote an autobiography that includes interesting data on Murik customs, but Lipset's monograph is the first in English to focus directly on Murik society and culture.

With gender specific hubris, Murik men, as in many other Melanesian societies, apportion to themselves ultimate political power, not only in human relationships but in the maintenance and reproduction of society. However, it is mothers who give birth

and, via the breast, generously nurture children. Documenting men's cultural inventions to appropriate women's biologically determined procreative nature has occupied several generations of ethnologists. How do men appropriate the powerful creative and nurturing aspects of women whose sexuality they also fear and denigrate? Lipset is but one of the most recent to confront and describe this male dilemma.

Lipset and Barlow's initial sixteen months of research was in 1981-1982 with brief visits in 1986, 1988 (with their two small sons), and a brief solo visit by Lipset in 1993. *Mangrove Man*, a reworking of his 1984 doctoral dissertation, *Authority and the Maternal Presence: An Interpretive Ethnography of Murik Lakes Society*, is an "account of men's dialogues with images of womanhood in Murik culture" (xv). The "dialogues" in question are not literal ones but Lipset's schematic inferences informed by his research. This, then, is not a full account of Murik society and culture but one that is highly circumscribed by Lipset's specific ethnographic concern and the conceptual template he imposes to explore it. Like his mentor Gregory Bateson's celebrated 1936 book *Naven* on the nearby Iatmul, *Mangrove Man* is an audacious ethnographic experiment that will challenge, exasperate, and sometimes illuminate the reader. Also, like *Naven*, it probably will not spawn imitations. Adopting a "dialogical" approach to cultural analysis borrowed from the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, Lipset applies it in a thoroughgoing—even relentless—manner that can leave the

reader dizzy and dazed. Unless one delights in highly abstract and recondite ethnographic analysis, it is a book that may take many sittings to read and digest.

In the simplest terms, this is a book about Lipset's view of how Murik men view themselves. In many of the men's roles, for example, as kinsmen, trading partners, and ceremonial celebrants, "they see themselves as possessing qualities or attributes they associate with a chaste other who is surrounded by hungry, dependent children in need of 'her' nurture, hygiene, protection and instruction" (3). He characterizes this set of external and visible attributes as "a maternal schema," noting that in some situations it is explicitly acknowledged by Murik men, while in others it might be veiled or even inverted, for example, in obscene joking relations. But Murik mothers have other darker attributes related to their bodily interior, notably powers of sexuality and fertility, that men openly stigmatize. His major argument "is that this inner/outer split in the maternal body is part of a 'hidden dialogue' in terms of which men think through and negotiate the reproduction of Murik culture" (3). Consequently the relationship or dialogue between Murik men and the "maternal body" is an equivocal one and Lipset wants to show the reader that it underlies much of what men do. "The men's answers," he observes, "are not to women *per se*, but to and about a culturally particular image of womanhood" (4). In other words, this is an analysis that represents Murik culture not in terms of unilateral control of men over women

but in terms of the "paradoxical metaphors" inherent in the male's "maternal schema."

After the introduction setting forth his analytical approach, the book is divided into three parts, each concerned with the "dialogics of the maternal schema," focusing successively on "the uterine body," "the cosmic body of man," and lastly, "social control." Part 1, almost half of the book, offers a short précis of Murik society, images of womanhood, reproduction beliefs in which "the uterine body" (not defined) is stigmatized, and a case study documenting an important aspect of "the maternal schema," namely "while the sexuality and procreative forces in 'her' interior body are conflict-ridden, 'her' exterior form is all facade, a hollow, androgynous 'canoe-body'" (13). Part 2 analyzes the "male cult," using data related to ritual and war, as an ambivalent response to the "maternal schema," while part 3 on social control analyzes a history of sometimes violent intercommunity conflicts. Throughout the book, Lipset's data are primarily construed through his metaphorical concepts, so his rhetoric, for example, "dialogue between the uterine body and the maternal schema" (109) or "the aggression of the cosmic body" (178) may tend to mystify the society for the reader without a strong affinity for poesy in ethnography.

What are the advantages of construing an ethnography into Bakhtinian "dialogism"? Lipset cites several, not the least of which is Bakhtin's view of culture as a multi-vocal, equivocal, system of meanings "which admit to no finalizability" (5),

an approach especially appropriate for the study of changing Melanesian cultures. As testament to Lipset's success in realizing his goal "to illustrate the relationship between Murik men and the maternal body as a Bakhtinian dialogue" (10), his ponderous metaphorical vocabulary remained vivid in my imagination when I finished the book, but at the expense of an equally vivid visualization of Murik society. The book is well produced (although Annette and James Weiner's last name is consistently misspelled) and the glossary is helpful to keep track of indigenous terms that, thankfully, are used with restraint.

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Cultural Dynamics of Religious Change in Oceania, edited by Ton Otto and Ad Borsboom. Leiden: KITLV Press (Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology), 1997. ISBN 90-6718-119-6, viii + 144 pages, figures, notes, bibliography, index. Paper, US\$33.50. Distributed in the United States by the Book Bin.

This is a book of essays focused on Melanesian religion. At first glance, this fact about its contents may not strike readers as particularly noteworthy. Yet although quite a few edited collections focus on specific aspects or kinds of Melanesian religion (male cults, female cults, cargo cults, witchcraft, Christianity), few take religion in general as their brief. One of this volume's great successes is the argument it makes for the value of focus-

ing attention on religion broadly defined.

The editors themselves offer one reason for focusing on religion in general in the volume's epilogue, a chapter that stands out as a short but very stimulating theoretical essay that can be read profitably even by those who have not read the other papers in the book. After laying out a typology of kinds of changes cultures can undergo when faced with contact with another culture (a useful list that includes incorporation of new elements into old frames, rearrangement of frames, opposition to the new, experiment with the new, and displacement of the old), Ton Otto and Ad Borsboom go on to observe that as contemporary Melanesians develop a host of new categories for comprehending social life—categories such as custom, business, government, and the like—and as they encounter Christianity and its condemnation of "traditional religion," many of them have begun to formulate their own notions of a discrete realm of the religious. Once such a category is loose in local thought, it makes sense for anthropologists to study it across the broad range that it covers. This is what the contributors to this volume do. Through their work, one gets a sense of the definitional and evaluative debates that make religion such a charged area in contemporary Melanesia.

Leaving aside Thomas Widlok's interesting paper on the sociological transformations effected by Australian traveling rituals, the volume's six ethnographic chapters fall into two groups. Three of them deal with the ways Papua New Guineans have